

Rep. Baird Votes NO on PATRIOT Act Reauthorization-In Bittersweet Twist, Bairds Comprehensive Meth Bill Attached to Act- (December 14, 2005)

Washington, D.C. - Congressman Brian Baird today issued the following statement after voting against the final PATRIOT Act reauthorization that passed by the House 251 to 174. In a bittersweet twist, the comprehensive Combat Meth Epidemic Act that Congressman Baird helped author was attached to the unrelated, controversial Patriot Act legislation.

"I am incredibly pleased the Combat Meth Epidemic Act, a bill I helped write, passed the House today. Meth is a scourge on communities throughout Southwest Washington and across the country. The common sense Combat Meth Epidemic Act will help secure our borders against dangerous meth trafficking and smuggling, and improve the prosecution of meth-related crimes right here at home.

"I am extremely disappointed, however, that this great piece of meth legislation was attached to the completely unrelated and very controversial Patriot Act. Meth bills have received unprecedented support in recent months; this meth bill could have easily passed on its own merits and without being attached as a rider to the controversial Patriot Act.

"All members of Congress, whatever their party, are united in their commitment to fighting terrorism and protecting our communities and families. Everyone agrees that law enforcement must have the tools they need to fully investigate potential terrorist threats and keep Americans safe. I strongly supported the 911 Commission's intelligence reforms and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, and I have voted to increase security at our nation's ports, rail and transit systems and to fully fund our local law enforcement and first responders.

"There are a number of valuable elements in the PATRIOT Act. For example, roving surveillance can be tremendously useful in tracking terrorist suspects on the move. Facilitating cooperation and information-sharing among law enforcement and intelligence agencies is another essential provision.

"For these reasons, and the promise that Congress would have thorough review and rigorous oversight of the PATRIOT Act's sunset provisions, I voted for this bill in the immediate aftermath of September 11th. However, I have serious concerns about this reauthorization bill, which is why I voted against it when it came before the House in July. These concerns were reflected in the countless letters, emails, phone calls, and town hall questions I have received from constituents.

"Today's final reauthorization bill did little to alleviate my concerns. I continue to be concerned that provisions in the PATRIOT Act, such as the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISA Court) and national security letters, may be abused. FISA is subject to virtually no oversight and meets in total secrecy to rule on surveillance and search requests for American citizens. Last year alone, the secret court received nearly 2,000 such requests, denying only one. Few Americans are even aware of the secret court's existence and because its rulings are sealed, it is doubtful many ever will. Similarly, national security letters enable the government to obtain documents, such as medical and financial records, without any judicial oversight. When asked to provide Congress with information about how these letters were used, the Bush Administration initially refused.

"I do not believe Congress should give the government unchecked power to intrude upon the private lives and constitutional rights of American citizens. I do believe that we can and must effectively fight terrorism while protecting our privacy and constitutional rights."

Congressman Brian Baird, a national leader in the anti-meth fight, co-authored and co-sponsored the Combat Meth Epidemic Act, a comprehensive bill aimed at fighting the spread of methamphetamine. Congressman Baird worked with Congressman Mark Souder (R-IN), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources and other members of the Congressional Meth Caucus to draft the legislation.

Congressman Baird co-founded the bipartisan Congressional Caucus to Fight and Control Methamphetamine in 2000. The Methamphetamine Remediation Research Act of 2005 (HR 798), a bill Congressman Baird co-sponsored and championed through Science Committee hearings, unanimously passed the House yesterday. Prior to coming to Congress, Congressman Baird was a clinical psychologist who worked with meth addicts, learning firsthand the destructive potential of the drug.

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